

2.4 The Teacher in the Catholic School

As noted earlier, 'the prime responsibility for creating this unique Christian school climate rests with the teachers, as individuals and as a community.'

(The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, n. 26)



Teaching is an activity involving relationships. Through their relationships with each other and with students, their families and community contexts, teachers communicate what they value, what they believe, and something of what they know. Teaching is an ancient and noble way of life, calling for professional standards of practice, generosity in commitment, and spiritual awareness.

Professional Standards of Practice

Like any profession, teaching contributes to the common good and quality of society. Society therefore expects high personal and professional standards from members of the teaching profession. The scope of the profound trust invested in teachers and their work by the community is reflected in the Standards of Professional Practice for Full Registration by the Victorian Institute of Teaching.

Professional Knowledge		
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1. Teachers know how students learn and how to teach them effectively
2. Teachers know the content they teach
3. Teachers know their students

	Professional Practice	
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4. Teachers plan and assess for effective learning
5. Teachers create and maintain safe and challenging learning environments
6. Teachers use a range of teaching practices and resources to engage students in effective teaching

		Professional Engagement
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7. Teachers reflect on, evaluate and improve their professional knowledge and practice
8. Teachers are active members of their professions

While much will be in common with general teaching practice, specific indicators of each standard apply to both the religious dimension of the Catholic school and classroom Religious Education.

Generosity in commitment

Teaching is a demanding and, at times, stressful profession. The complexity of contemporary family and community life, the expectations of higher education institutions, business and industry, and the learning and well-being needs of students, all contribute to the intensely personal and professional demands felt by teachers.

Catholic schools also ask of teachers an active contribution to the building of the distinctive culture of the school, described in the previous section. While respecting a teacher's freedom of conscience and personal integrity, each member of the school staff is obliged by the terms of their employment to promote actively the religious culture, mission and aims of their school.

A real and sometimes costly generosity is therefore involved in teachers' commitment to their profession. Teaching summons their every capacity to service of the integral development of their students, within an educational community centered on the Gospel.

'The nobility of the task to which teachers are called demands that, in imitation of Christ the only Teacher, they reveal the Christian message not only by word but also by every gesture of their behaviour.' (The Catholic School, n. 43)

School authorities must be constantly aware of the demanding nature of teaching, and actively provide support to staff members through professional development opportunities, personal management skills and workplace conditions that promote wellbeing and excellence.

Spiritual awareness

Because their profession requires a high degree of personal investment, teachers need to be aware of their own spiritual life. Adults who are spiritually alive and attentive to their interior, moral and aesthetic capacities become transformative mentors for students, and are able to maintain their commitment to their vocation.

From a Catholic perspective, spirituality flows from the dynamic inter-relatedness of interior and exterior, physical and spiritual, visible and invisible, feminine and masculine, active and contemplative, the human and the divine. It begins in awareness of the inter-connectedness of experience, and proceeds through the discipline of sustained awareness towards a conscious participation

in the dynamics of these relationships. The spiritual dimension is expressed through language, symbol, ritual and creativity. It invites a lifelong journey of becoming the 'image of God' (*imago Dei*) in creation.

"I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, God may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

(Eph, 3: 16-19)

School authorities can assist teachers to value and enrich their spiritual life, in ways appropriate to a teacher's stage of life, prior experience, life situation and personal style. There is a challenge to Catholic faith communities to explore ways to engage the staff of their schools with the rich resources of the various styles of spirituality within the tradition. The particular charism and spiritual heritage of religious institutes can make an important contribution to the spiritual awareness of staff of their schools, and more generally to the mission of Catholic education.